

An idiom is an expression or phrase, often informal, having a meaning of its own that is not apparent from the meaning of its individual words, for example, *round the bend* is an idiom meaning 'mad'.

LIST OF IMPORTANT IDIOMS AND PHRASES

The following list of some common idioms and phrases along with their meanings will enable you to tackle questions on idioms/phrases.

<i>Idiom/Phrase</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
1. The alpha and omega	Beginning and end
2. To mind one's P's and Q's	To be accurate and precise
3. To rise from the ranks	To rise to a high position
4. A feather in one's cap	An achievement to be proud of
5. To cut one's coat according	To live within one's means
6. To grease a person's palm	To bribe
7. To keep the ball rolling	To continue the work
8. To fight tooth and nail	To make all efforts to win
9. To make an ass of oneself	To act foolishly
10. To make neither head nor tail of anything	To be completely baffled
11. Once in a blue moon	Rarely
12. To take to one's heels	To run away
13. To pay lip service to	To pretend to be loyal
14. To pay through the nose	To pay very dearly
15. To take the law into one's hand	To have a disregard for law and order
16. Between the devil and the deep sea	To be in a dilemma
17. To meet one's Waterloo	To meet one's final defeat
18. To be on the horns of a dilemma	To be in a fix
19. To look for a needle in a haystack	To seek what is impossible to find
20. To let the cat out of the bag	To reveal a secret
21. To wash one's dirty linen in public	To discuss dirty and scandalous matter of personal nature in the presence of outsiders
22. To be ill at ease	To have bad terms with somebody
23. To be in hornet's nest	To be in an unpleasant situation
24. Apple of discord	Cause of dispute
25. Bell the cat	Do the most dangerous job
26. Beat about the bush	Evade the issue
27. Bag and baggage	Completely
28. Come out of a bandbox	Be excessively well-dressed
29. Know how many beans make five	To be well informed to be intelligent
30. Hit below the belt	Fight unfairly
31. To kill two birds with one shot	Achieve two aims with a single effort
32. Birthday suit	Naked
33. In cold blood	Deliberately, without heat
34. Sweep in the board	Take everything
35. In the same boat	Similarly situated, like in a predicament
36. Bolt from the blue	Unexpected calamity
37. Bone of contention	Matter of dispute
38. Make no bones	Make no objections
39. It does not suit my book	It doesn't fit my arrangements
40. In good or bad books	In or out of favour
41. Draw the long bow	Exaggerate
42. Two strings to bow	Possessing a second way of attaining one's object

<i>Idiom/Phrase</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Idiom/Phrase</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
43. In the wrong box	Out of one's proper place	72. To put in corner	To punish
44. Break new ground	Venture into an untried field	73. To split hairs	To make pretty and fine distinctions
45. Make a clean breast	Confess, own up	74. Win by a hair	To win by a narrow margin
46. Wear the breeches	Domination of the husband by the wife	75. To turn a hair	To reveal discomfiture
47. Bring down the house	Receive rapturous applause	76. To get in someone's hair	To upset or annoy someone
48. Bear the brunt	Endure the greater part of a stress or burden	77. To step into another's shoes	To take another's place
49. Take the bull by the horns	Attack danger boldly	78. A snake in the grass	Unrecognized danger
50. Burning the candle at both ends	Trying to do two opposite and exhausting things at the same time	79. On the cards	Likely to happen
51. Take the cake	Carry off the honours	80. Put the horse before the cart	Reverse the natural order
52. Not worth the candle	Not worth the expense involved	81. To make castle in the air	Daydream
53. To feather one's nest	To care for self-interest	82. Cat and dog life	Life of constant discord
54. To go against the grain	To work against one's liking	83. Know chalk from the cheese	Be able to discriminate
55. A thorn in flesh	A cause of continual trouble	84. Take two bites at a cherry	Make two attempts where one should suffice
56. A bird's eye view	A general view	85. Chip of the old block	Exemplifying the family
57. To cut no ice	To have no effect	86. Show a clean pair of heels	Escape
58. To come off with flying colours	To achieve distinction	87. Clear the decks	Prepare for action
59. A bird in hand is worth two in the bush	One certainty is worth more than two prospective advantages	88. Cock and bull story	Ridiculous story
60. To enjoy lion's share	To enjoy major part	89. To give the cold shoulder	Snub or behave differently towards a person
61. Sweat of one's brow	Hard labour	90. Drive into a corner	Cut off all means of escape
62. To put one's shoulder to the wheels	To help oneself	91. Crocodile tears	Hypocritical tears
63. To have a jaundiced eye	To be prejudiced	92. The sword of Damocles	Impending evil
64. To go with the tide	To do as others do	93. To have a hard day	To be past one's prime
65. To read between lines	To understand the hidden meaning of the writer	94. Dead men's shows	Await someone's death with the expectancy of benefiting from it
66. To wake up a sleeping dog	To disturb some person or condition capable of causing trouble	95. Make a dead set at	Attack with determination
67. To see eye to eye	To agree	96. Between the devil and the deep (blue) sea	Between two equal evils
68. To carry coal to new castle	To do something which is unnecessary	97. Gone to the dogs	Done for, ruined
69. To fish in troubled waters	To make most of a bad bargain	98. Down in the mouth	Low-spirited
70. Blood is thicker than water	Kingship is stronger than friendship	99. Sow dragon's teeth	Make a bad situation worse
71. To put down in black and white	To write down on paper	100. Allow the dust to settle	Wait until the disturbance is well and truly over
		101. As sure as eggs is eggs	As sure as anything can be
		102. Make both ends meet	Live within one's budgeted income
		103. Fall to the ground	Argument which is unfounded

<i>Idiom/Phrase</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Idiom/Phrase</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
104. Play fast and loose	Be inconsistent; unreliable in fulfilling obligations	132. Pretty kettle of fish	Bad business
105. The fat is in the fire	The mischief is out	133. Lay by the heels	Render harmless
106. Put a good face on the matter	Make the best of a bad job	134. Turn over a new leaf	Make a fresh start
107. For good and all	Permanently	135. There is no love lost between them	They dislike one another
108. Cut the Gordian knot	Solve a difficulty in summary fashion	136. Left in the lurch	Abandoned; at a grave disadvantage
109. Go without saying	Be self-evident	137. Land of milk and honey	Land abounding in good things
110. Sour grapes	Disparaging what is beyond one's reach	138. To make mountains out of molehills	Make trifling difficulties seem insuperable
111. All is grist that comes in his mill	He turns everything to his profit	139. Nail in (one's) coffin	Anything that tends to shorten life; drink, worry, etc.
112. Without turning a hair	Without any sign of discomfort	140. Hit the nail on the head	Judge right; say something exactly right
113. With high hand	Arrogantly; imperiously	141. Pay through the nose	Pay an excessive or exorbitant price
114. To be in hand-and-glove (or hand-in-glove)	Inseparable, on intimate terms	142. Led by the nose	Mislead; deceived
115. Wash hands off the matter	Have nothing to do with it	143. It makes no odds	It makes no difference
116. Out of harness	Retired; at leisure	144. Pour oil on troubled waters	Soothe strife; use tact and discretion
117. Make a hash of (something)	Make a mess of it; do it badly	145. Olive branch	Emblem of peace
118. After my own heart	According to my views and tastes	146. Part and parcel	Essential portion
119. With heart in (one's) boots (or mouth)	Terrified, apprehensive; alarmed	147. Pay the piper	Defray the cost or bear the loss in an undertaking
120. Wear heart on (one's) sleeve	Make public your private feelings	148. Cast pearls before a swine	Offer good things to people incapable of appreciating them
121. By hook or by crook	By one way or the other	149. Pig in a poke	Unexamined purchase
122. Reckon without (one's) host	To look at a matter from one's own point of view	150. From pillar to post	Hither and thither indiscriminately
123. To eat a humble pie	Show oneself full of humility	151. To be out of pocket	To lose money or to pay more than one's share
124. To break the ice	To take the first step in breaking down cold reserve or prepare the way	152. Born in the purple	Child of royal parents
125. Long innings	Long spell of success	153. Put up the shutters	To go out of business
126. Ins and outs	The minute particulars	154. Rain cats and dogs	Rain heavily
127. Dwell in an ivory tower	Be detached from the everyday preoccupations of mankind	155. Rank and file	Common soldiers, hence followers
128. Lay their heads together	Plan an enterprise jointly	156. Smell a rat	Detect something suspicious
129. At the eleventh hour	Just on time	157. Red-letter day	Day of special consequence
130. Jack of all trades	One who tries his hand at everything but excels in nothing	158. With neither rhyme nor reason	Without any sense; useless
131. Keep body and soul together	Stay alive	159. Rule the roost	To be in control
		160. Robbing Peter to pay Paul	Transferring a burden from one to another, benefitting one at the expense of another

Idiom/Phrase	Meaning
161. By rule of the thumb	By experience, practical though rough
162. Not worth (one's) salt	Inefficient, not worth one's keep
163. Take with a grain of salt (or pinch of salt)	With considerable reservations
164. Another pair of shoes	Different matter
165. Step into another man's shoes	Take over another's position
166. Straight from the shoulder	With full force
167. Born with a silver spoon	Born in a wealthy family
168. At sixes and sevens	In a state of confusion
169. Throw up the sponge	Admit defeat
170. Square pegs in round holes (or, boxes)	People in wrong jobs
171. Man of straw	Without substance
172. Turn the tables	Reverse the situation between two persons
173. On the tip of (one's) tongue	Almost remembering but not quite
174. Blow (one's) own trumpet	Sing one's own praise
175. Valley of the shadow of death	Nearness to death; place of fear for those poor in faith
176. Go to the wall	Give way; be vanquished
177. Throw cold water on	Discourage
178. Wheels within wheels	Situation of extreme complexity
179. White elephant	Something useless and expensive
180. Show the white feather	Behave like a coward

In your examination, you may come across questions on idioms and phrases in the following format:

Direction: In the following questions, four alternatives are given for the idiom/phrase italicized in the sentence. Choose the one which best expresses the meaning of the underlined idiom/phrase in the sentence.

- The cricket match proved to be a *big draw*.
(a) a keen contest
(b) a huge attraction
(c) a goal-less match
(d) a game without any result
- Pt Nehru was *born with a silver spoon in his mouth*.
(a) born in a middle-class family
(b) born in a wealthy family
(c) born in a family of nationalists
(d) born in a family of intellectuals
- In the armed forces, it is considered a great privilege to *die in harness*.
(a) pain and suffering

- die in battlefield
- die while still working
- die with honour

- The thief *took to his heels* when he saw a policeman.
(a) had some pain in his heels
(b) ran away from the scene
(c) confronted the policeman
(d) could not decide what to do

Answers

- (b)
- (b)
- (c)
- (b)

WALKTHROUGH DRILLS

Direction: In the following questions four alternatives are given for the idiom/phrase italicized in the sentence. Choose the one which best expresses the meaning of the given idiom/phrase.

- His most trusted friend proved to be a *snake in the grass*.
(a) an unreliable person (b) a hidden enemy
(c) low and mean (d) cowardly and brutal
- The captors of the kidnapped kept his family *on tenter-hooks*.
(a) an anxious suspense (b) on constant move
(c) in seething anger (d) in excited wait
- I have come to know of your *hole-and-corner* methods of dealing with people.
(a) suspicious (b) secret
(c) servile (d) strict
- They are sure to *steal a march* upon their competitors.
(a) outshine (b) defy
(c) challenge (d) resist
- He was in a *brown study* and did not seem to catch my point.
(a) in his study room (b) absorbed in reading
(c) absent-minded (d) in a state of shock
- The authorities *took him to task* for his negligence.
(a) gave him additional work
(b) suspended his assignment
(c) forced him to resign
(d) reprimanded him
- I am sure they will *fight tooth and nail* for their rights.
(a) with all their rights (b) with all their might
(c) without any weapon (d) very cowardly
- The detective *left no stone unturned* to trace the culprit.
(a) took no pains
(b) did very irrelevant things
(c) restored to illegitimate practices
(d) used all available means
- He was in *high spirits* when I met him in the restaurant.
(a) in a drunken state

- (b) was very cheerful
(c) talked incoherently
(d) was deeply engrossed in thoughts
10. Harassed by repeated acts of injustice, he decided to *put his foot down*.
(a) not to yield
(b) resign
(c) withdraw
(d) to accept the proposal unconditionally
11. Harshad Mehta could be easily arrested because the police was *tipped off* in advance.
(a) bribed
(b) cautioned
(c) given advance information
(d) threatened
12. You cannot *have your cake and eat it too*.
(a) enjoy for ever
(b) enjoy without payment
(c) have it both ways
(d) absolve yourself of guilt
13. In the beginning of his career, he was practically *rolling in money*.
(a) wasting a lot of money
(b) spending more than his earnings
(c) very rich
(d) saving lot of money
14. Those were only *crocodile tears*.
(a) pretended sadness (b) a weeping sign
(c) mild regret (d) very gloomy
15. He was murdered in *cold blood*.
(a) coolly (b) deliberately
(c) unfeelingly (d) thoughtlessly
16. The students were *in the blue* when they heard that the examination would not be postponed after all.
(a) cheerless and depressed
(b) violent and angry
(c) wearing blue badges
(d) singing sad songs
17. To give so much importance to this dispute is to *make a mountain of a molehill*.
(a) to take advantage to trifles
(b) to give great importance to trifles
(c) to see a thing with prejudiced mind
(d) to get into trouble
18. The captain played with determination because the honour of the team was *at stake*.
(a) at the top (b) in danger
(c) very low (d) appropriate
19. The inspector was caught *red-handed*.
(a) quickly
(b) caught in the act of committing the crime
(c) caught with dirty hands
(d) found with hands tied
20. She *cut a sad figure* in her first performance on the stage.
(a) made a sorry figure (b) cut a sorry face
(c) did not do well (d) performed a sad role
21. Sunita has *bitten off more than she can chew*.
(a) over and above
(b) beyond her capacity
(c) trying to do too much
(d) bad fall
22. He never wanted to *keep her under his thumb* and so he let her do what she liked.
(a) below his thumb
(b) restricted
(c) unduly under control
(d) in his presence all the time
23. I have *a bone to pick* with you in this matter.
(a) am angry (b) selfish motive
(c) selfless motive (d) desire
24. The cashier *wiped the nose* of his employer by presenting false bills.
(a) abused (b) cheated
(c) slapped (d) doomed
25. It is time that professors came down from their *ivory towers* and studied the real needs of students.
(a) expensive fee
(b) detachment and seclusion
(c) dreamlands
(d) a tower made of ivory

Answers

1. (b)	2. (a)	3. (b)	4. (a)	5. (b)
6. (d)	7. (b)	8. (d)	9. (b)	10. (a)
11. (c)	12. (c)	13. (c)	14. (a)	15. (c)
16. (a)	17. (b)	18. (b)	19. (b)	20. (d)
21. (c)	22. (c)	23. (a)	24. (b)	25. (b)

PACE APPRAISAL TESTS (PAT)

[No. of Questions = 25 Time allotted = 20 mins]

Direction: In the following questions four alternatives are given for the each idiom/phrase. Choose the one which best expresses the meaning of the given idiom/phrase.

- To cry wolf*
(a) to give false alarm
(b) to turn pale
(c) to ruin oneself
(d) to overcome someone
- To have an axe to grind*
(a) to work for both sides
(b) to have no result
(c) to criticise someone
(d) to fail to arouse interest
- To hit the nail on the head*
(a) to do things right
(b) to announce one's fixed views

- (c) to destroy one's reputation
(d) to teach someone a lesson
4. *To be at cross-purposes*
(a) missed each other
(b) work against each other
(c) dislike each other
(d) misunderstand each other
5. *To the ends of the earth*
(a) up to a certain limit
(b) everywhere
(c) till losing one's interest
(d) till losing one's patience
6. *To be in dribs and drabs*
(a) without fail (b) with much ease
(c) in small quantities (d) with great difficulty
7. *A hard nut to crack is*
(a) one who is very obstinate
(b) very difficult child
(c) a walnut or a fruit
(d) problem which cannot be solved
8. *A cock and bull story means*
(a) an unbelievable gossip
(b) a children's fable
(c) quarrelsome dialogue
(d) competition between unequals
9. *The gift of the gab*
(a) an unexpected gain
(b) fluency of speech
(c) thought-provoking oration
(d) a X-mas gift
10. *A fool's paradise means*
(a) a foolish idea
(b) an imaginary idea
(c) an unexpected gain
(d) false hopes for a foolish person
11. *A man of spirit is*
(a) a very talented man
(b) a spiritual person
(c) a very courageous man
(d) a unique person
12. *The murder of the king is called a*
(a) homicide (b) matricide
(c) patricide (d) regicide
13. *Allowance paid by a husband to his wife on legal separation is*
(a) compensation (b) alimony
(c) substance (d) dearness allowance
14. *The belief in witchcraft is losing ground even in remote areas now.*
(a) acquiring power
(b) continuing as before
(c) deeply engrained
(d) becoming less acceptable
15. *There are black sheep in every community.*
(a) good leaders (b) bad characters
(c) poor persons (d) intelligent people
16. *We talked over the matter for an hour but without any result*
(a) surveyed (b) assessed
(c) fought about (d) discussed
17. *To pick holes*
(a) to find some reason to fight
(b) to destroy something
(c) to criticise someone
(d) to cut some part of an item
18. *To drive home*
(a) to find one's roots
(b) back to original position
(c) to return to the place of rest
(d) to emphasize
19. *To beg the question*
(a) to refer to (b) to take for granted
(c) to raise objections (d) to be discussed
20. *To keep one's temper*
(a) to become angry
(b) to be in a good mood
(c) to preserve one's energy
(d) to be aloof from
21. *Although he ran into debt, he did not stop gambling*
(a) met with (b) had the risk of
(c) incurred (d) crushed into
22. *He went ahead and shot the elephant in order not to lose face in front of the natives.*
(a) be humiliated (b) be disfigured
(c) be blamed (d) be criticized
23. *So far as hazards of pollution are concerned the traffic policemen bear the brunt.*
(a) suffer the most
(b) are exposed to the danger
(c) face the consequence
(d) have to run the risk
24. *My boss is, in fact, a live wire; he works for twelve hours a day.*
(a) industrious and brilliant
(b) lively and active
(c) sincere and intelligent
(d) sincere and efficient
25. *Every opponent of Mohammad Ali has gone to the well in the contest with him so far*
(a) failed to defeat
(b) proved equal
(c) achieved one's aim
(d) broken one's bones

Answers

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|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. (a) | 2. (b) | 3. (d) | 4. (d) | 5. (b) |
| 6. (c) | 7. (d) | 8. (a) | 9. (b) | 10. (d) |
| 11. (c) | 12. (d) | 13. (b) | 14. (d) | 15. (b) |
| 16. (d) | 17. (c) | 18. (d) | 19. (b) | 20. (b) |
| 21. (c) | 22. (a) | 23. (a) | 24. (b) | 25. (a) |

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